



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8

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JAN 14 2010

Ref: 8EPR-N

Jeni Bradley Evans, District Ranger
Conejos Peak Ranger District
Rio Grande National Forest
15571 CR T.5
La Jara, CO 81140

Re: Rio de los Pinos,
Vegetation Management Project
Draft EIS: CEQ #20090408

Dear Ms. Evans:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 8 reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Rio de los Pinos Vegetation Management Project in the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) in accordance with EPA's responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 7609. As presented in the DEIS, the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS), Conejos Peak Ranger District proposes to salvage Engelmann spruce trees that have been killed by or are infested with spruce beetle and to regenerate areas heavily impacted by the beetle by planting Engelmann spruce seedlings in the Rio de los Pinos Analysis area. The proposed treatments would contribute toward providing a sustained yield of forest products from the RGNF and would ensure meeting or moving toward Forest Plan and project-specific Desired Conditions. The analysis area, approximately 1,380 acres, is located about two miles northwest of Cumbres Pass, Colorado and in Conejos County, Colorado.

The DEIS provides a good narrative summary and adequately addresses environmental concerns from the proposed project. EPA understands that the proposed project is not intended to stop or control the spruce beetle infestation but rather to take advantage of the existing road system to salvage trees killed by spruce beetle to recover economic value, provide a sustained yield of forest products from the RGNF, provide funding to regenerate heavily impacted stands, and create areas suitable for artificial regeneration. The project is also intended to create conditions less favorable to spruce beetle infestations in adjacent stands for the next 20 years. During the project, road reconstruction and/or maintenance (pre-haul, during haul, post-haul) would occur on 12.7

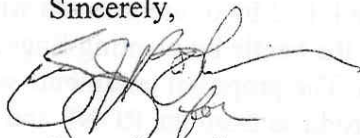
miles of classified roads, and up to approximately 2 miles of old roads would be temporarily re-opened, then closed at the end of the project. Vegetation management and temporary road construction are not planned near intermittent and perennial streams unless needed for skid trail or road crossing. However, no skid trails, equipment, or mechanical ground disturbance would be allowed in or immediately adjacent to channels (within 25 ft).

EPA understands that the existing roads will be evaluated to identify erosion and sediment problems so they can be fixed as part of road maintenance operations. Existing road segments used in timber harvest operations that are within the water influence zone (100 feet) of intermittent and perennial streams will be inspected by hydrology or soils specialists or their designees to ensure sediment sources are disconnected from the stream system. EPA believes there are adequate methods in place if necessary, such as wattles and silt fences, and that other appropriate sediment control would be installed to prevent sediment from entering the stream.

Pursuant to EPA policy and guidance, EPA rates the environmental impact of an action and the adequacy of the NEPA analysis. EPA has rated the proposed action presented in this DEIS as "LO" (Lack of Objection) under EPA's rating criteria. This rating means that our review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. An explanation of the rating criteria is enclosed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the DEIS. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments, please contact Sarah Hester of my staff at (303) 312-6008, or you may contact me at (303) 312-6004.

Sincerely,



Larry Svoboda

Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

Enclosure

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for Draft Environmental Impact Statements

Definitions and Follow-Up Action*

Environmental Impact of the Action

LO -- Lack of Objections: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

EC -- Environmental Concerns: The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

EO -- Environmental Objections: The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EU -- Environmentally Unsatisfactory: The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

Adequacy of the Impact Statement

Category 1 -- Adequate: EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category 2 -- Insufficient Information: The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category 3 -- Inadequate: EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

* From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment. February, 1987.

